

Bury Lane Fruit Farm, S/2616/13/FL - E W Pepper Ltd.

Development of solar photovoltaic panels and ancillary structures including; field transformers, auxiliary transformer, inverter housing, communication room, District Network Operator (DNO) building and switch room building, access tracks, security fencing and security cameras.

Meldreth Parish Council recommend **Refusal** with comments.

Reasons for refusal are based on the following:

1. The size of the proposal is 47 hectares (116 acres), we understand the largest currently being considered by SCDC (see below) and is a comparable size to the developed area of Meldreth village.
2. There would be a visual impact from high ground nearby and from some local areas.
3. Possible reflection hazard for trains passing immediately by the site and aircraft overhead from airfields in Meldreth, Fowlmere, Duxford and Marshalls as well as long haul routes.
4. Loss of good (Grade 2) arable farmland for at least 25 years
5. There is already a proposed solar farm at Orwell and another in Melbourn at the A10/A505 junction. Our research of the SCDC web site has shown that there are already 13 applications pending (6 for full planning and 7 requesting EIA clearance) and 4 approved. There may be others at the pre-application stage. Meldreth Parish Council believes that because of this and due to the size of this application it should be looked at as part of the whole solar development within the South Cambs area from the standpoint of how much arable farm land we should loose or what is the fair burden we should bear on our landscape.

Another concern which was raised by the public was:

Vermin control – little thought had been given concerning this, as already there is a large rabbit problem in this area and control by shooting is not possible.

However, Meldreth are aware that there is a need for low carbon energy and that the area in question would be suitable for this purpose as being on level ground landscaping can in time be used to ameliorate the impact from most viewpoints. The size of the scheme would make it more economical and the substation, which is already in situ, would be of benefit to the scheme.

Meldreth Parish Council believes that local opposition to the scheme would be less and the scheme improved if the overall size of the development was reduced by removing the southern field bounded by the bridleway and the railway line. This would allow landscaping to be at some distance from Ashwell Stret so the long views to Barrington Hill would not be lost which would take away some of the overall impact of the development. The pre-application advice, given by letter on 12 September 2013 from Andrew Fillmore and included in the application, in fact suggests this too as it would remove an "unacceptable intrusion into the countryside".

If SCDC is minded to grant planning permission we would support the use of sheep to graze the grassland and Meldreth Local History group have requested the opportunity to walk the site before grass is seeded to see if interesting artefacts from past history have been uncovered.

Public Consultation

Meldreth Parish is also concerned that there has been confusion as to which parish the application lies within and that this has resulted in the public consultation, outlined in the application, being less effective than it should have been. In fact the application site and the applicant's business, Bury Lane Farm shop, lie wholly within the parish of Meldreth. The parish boundary with Melbourn runs along Ashwell Stret/Harcamlow Way to the south of the proposed solar farm. The visibility splay of this track with the A10 is the only land mentioned in the application that is in Melbourn.

The pre-application advice, given by letter on 12 September 2013 from Andrew Fillmore and included in the application, suggests the site is in Melbourn as there is no mention of Meldreth and only views of the site from Melbourn are considered. However Savills, for the applicant, were suggested by SCDC to approach both parish councils to brief on their plans pre-application. We are disappointed as we have written to SCDC Planning in the past when we discovered that planning applications for Bury Lane Farm Shop had by-passed Meldreth Parish Council completely and only been dealt with by Melbourn Parish Council.

The confusion arises from Bury Lane Farm having a Melbourn postal address, probably dating back to before the A10 by-pass was built and the farm shop was accessed from the Melbourn end of Bury Lane.

We arranged for Savills to attend our planning committee meeting on 21 November 2013 and discovered, in the process, that there would be a public exhibition in Melbourn on 22nd November. We asked for a similar meeting in Meldreth and were told that they had only budgeted for one meeting for both villages. When we explained that the site was located in Meldreth (they thought it was in both parishes!) they agreed to hold the meeting in Meldreth. As a result of the short notice the meeting was poorly attended by only 25 people; including all 9 parish councillors. After pressure from Melbourn Parish Council they did agree to a second exhibition in Melbourn on January 17th which was better publicised through Meldreth Matters and a leaflet drop by Savills to parts of the village. However Meldreth people would have attended the Meldreth meeting in greater numbers had they known about it.